

**BEFORE LEAVING AGAIN FOR  
SOMEWHERE ELSE**

A Poem

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## BEFORE LEAVING AGAIN FOR SOMEWHERE ELSE

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"Afterword: Encounters with the Author in Taipei and Environs"

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## BEFORE LEAVING AGAIN FOR SOMEWHERE ELSE

### I

The faces opposite are themselves a question,  
which in the twilight of occasional rooms  
rapidly filling with darkness  
are left behind for us, floating like leaves  
on the surface of past time. It is these the world has brought  
us.

Was there something underneath it all, though,  
that we were saving for another place, or for another time?  
I feel the breeze from an open window  
moving softly into the edges of the moment  
when the utmost of clarity, joined with the utmost  
of the capacity to endure it, is present briefly  
somewhere among the words I had been scanning,  
yet it must have been that my index finger, impatient,  
had gotten somewhat ahead of the eye  
which had been following it, and this explains it all,  
the consequences which were about to follow.

They didn't though, of course, and yet  
we felt them piled high like a tilting tower  
of playing cards -- weightless, like all suspicions.  
Then -- and how astonished we all were -- they toppled  
harmlessly  
around us, like the shadows of the leaves  
beneath the trees outside. Yet outside was itself  
the point we had been thinking of for so long.  
This was the problem, it was nothing

that had gotten in between our words,  
like something stuck between your teeth,  
as we spoke to each other in the most carefully modulated  
tones.

It wasn't an interpersonal communications thing at all,  
but rather on the back of every card  
as in the lines of the hand -- which one? the left? the right?

--

was written that one word, *Outside Outside Outside*,  
gaining significance with each repetition,  
like the shadow of the hand that holds a candle  
as it advances closer and closer to the wall.

And yet each one of us must put his hand  
into the lamplight briefly, watching the shapes  
we broadcast upward on the ceiling. It is this way  
that we know each other, though only as we are right now,  
never the places we have come from, origins so far  
removed

as to be less than moods, merely fragments of strange  
currencies,  
coins fallen into the well, dredged back miraculously to the  
light

flecked with black mud, or tossed into the fountain for  
good luck,  
then anxiously retrieved. It was the second most surprising  
thing,

therefore. How is it we had come so far  
and never seen each other naked? As at the beginning,  
beneath the waterfall of days, the high rocks  
pouring and pouring out their misting rainbows,  
coruscations of the common elements -- light and air  
and water. Was it really you there after all,  
behind the veil of falling light and mist? --  
a kind of rainbow in its own right  
and yet heavy -- punishing, crushing in its impact.  
And yet it's in this way I know that it was really you.

You have the marks of it still on you. Not a specific mark,  
rather a general impress on your being.  
You never see it for yourself perhaps.  
You *are* it in a sense. And yet I recognize you, yes,  
since it was me there too. It was me on the other side  
of the constantly falling chains. No matter what you say  
(and how many times you've tried denying it)  
I always feel this deep responsiveness  
between us, the after-echoes of the cataract.  
The most surprising thing of all, though,  
is how -- so often on a summer night  
when everything is hot and still and the moon shines down,  
a full moon so startlingly bright, and the crickets  
are insane and numerous in the bushes -- when you go out  
for a walk,  
so many people have their lights still on,  
and as you walk along it can't be helped  
if now and then you watch them for the time it takes  
to pass their house -- not going close to windows  
or anything objectionable (or actionable), just simply  
watching from the sidewalk the snatches of brief common  
things  
they happen to be doing, not stopping either  
and, no, not even slowing down -- a mere walk past  
with gaze not absolutely blinkered, curious  
to see a head, an arm, a someone staring into a computer,  
anything, and then the most surprising thing  
is how -- somehow -- they seem to know you're there.  
The street completely dark -- the nearest streetlight  
half a block away, or out -- there's no way they can see  
you.  
Yet hands appear adjusting shades and blinds,  
a face sometimes, amber lit against a curtain  
with a night light somewhere in the depths. How is it  
they could know my eyes were there at all?

But sight must be more tactile and intrusive than we realize.

Imagine as you walk the leaves are watching as you pass. It must be this way, too, that we remain half-conscious of each other, blind seeing stored up deep inside the roots, as then we grow to separate the leaves of space, or finally to disembark toward deeper privacies hidden in the unpainted sections of the canvas.

So this then is the thing I need to talk to you about -- gold glamour that you wear, and the look of time deeply unfurling all its sails for the blue regatta of your days. Tell me again how we bent toward each other in the pose of fervent listening which yet was knowing in detachment, subtly compassionate

with hints of similar routes held to by means not incompatible with deeper, half-archaic scrutinies. Yet only now do I begin to take the measure of the charmed association that has held us near these surfaces,

as reflections are held to the thin skin of the mirror, never allowed to sink in even a little way.

And how far down one actually *would* plunge is attested to in the pages of antiquity.

Yet Alice wasn't trying to cause trouble, it was all just a mix up, a category mistake, as she strove against the power of reflection itself seeking the impossible embrace with her long lost twin, the dark unearthly counterpart. Yet reflection is not our problem, and the surface is always concealed somewhere in previous depths you'd crossed unknowingly, and that's the real issue. It comes out once a month, twelve of them a year, more often if you want, you pays your money and you takes your choice.



And yet these pages that I find myself among  
are just those surfaces the depths of the dreaming city  
have brought up to me, as we waited by the side of the deep  
well listening,  
or the passing busses splashed us with rain water.  
They're not for free, of course, but payment is requested  
only after years, at times postponed indefinitely.  
Perhaps you've seen such people sitting around in  
restaurants or in bars,  
the small mark hidden underneath the tongue  
the only indication of their desolate idleness, the  
dereliction of dreams.  
Do you remember the time when every secret  
or encoded conversation was about drugs?  
And yet that time is past. They are no longer  
part of an arcanum, a hushed alternative hidden among  
the spires and high battlements of the bright aggressive  
world,  
but now instead a vendible commodity. In the self  
which is a sign-using and sign-creating matrix,  
(like a kind of goldfish bowl)  
which yet is itself a constituted sign, there is resident  
a desire for altered states of awareness  
which themselves bring about further uses  
of those same signs. Is there a language of the intoxicated?  
Am I speaking it to you now? And yet I am only writing,  
I am only -- now, for you -- a written script.  
Yet the intoxication of writing is so great  
it must conjure for itself the illusion of a speaking voice,  
a presence -- itself the greatest of illusions  
and the greatest intoxication -- there in the words.  
(Nakedness is presence, though, which everyone must  
crave.)  
And is there a community of the intoxicated?  
When did the idea of it flow away from the inundated  
world,

leaving these charred remnants, these small twisted structures?

And yet my imagination cannot even now give up the image of small secret bands of wanderers, small groups of the initiated, secret societies, or, in my more nostalgic moments, the lamplit circle of friends.

Where has the brief promise of my spring left me, where am I among the tilting shapes of the buildings, what crack am I supposed to have crawled out of? As I did, someone handed me the black leaves of the confidence trick, all that is left in the autumn as it inclines toward winter. I wear them wrapped around my heart, like broad leaves of cured tobacco, perhaps I should be entirely wrapped up this way, a sort of walking cigar. But in the land of gloves, do not think to look for a hand. And it was with my one good hand that I greeted the strangers who approached me, with my one good hand I guarded the radiant jewel of the pineal eye, with my one good hand I caught the drops of rain falling upward through the black sieve of the fire escape so many flights below, and with my one good eye I watched it race back up into the clouds and the clouds themselves zoom backward, flowing back and boiling away into the rim of the horizon. Yet still the bed sheets were hanging on the lines as I turned from the white screen of my amnesia to the open crack of sunset, the only possible opening between the sky and buildings, through which the crimson light flows over us, like blood from a small cut, a paper cut let's say, (and they always say that head wounds bleed the most.) For this reason the city is consumed with twilight creeping up the buildings.

And yet some shadows are a means of concealment

and possible escape. Yet maybe we should all rush out,  
expose ourselves to the fullest measure of the sun's decline.  
(Come on! Let's go!) Already I am more than halfway  
there.

But what more could there be between my silhouette,  
however dark,  
and the radiant disarray of clouds, the profusion of  
evening?

What more could they be hiding there,  
the invisible ones who yet determine what is seen?  
In the interval between my partial waking and my fuller  
sleep

I listen to the cars that pass me in the street below,  
(For I am down there too, walking -- always walking.

What is it that I'm looking for, or whom? )

even as I lie here, my last coins on both my eyes.

The dying away of sound creates a sort of tunnel in the  
mind,

and down it you could pour the days, the nights, the  
incessant traffic,

the flocks of clouds in the bluest of all your skies,  
your friends could go there too, and every single one  
of your degrees, certificates, the works...

and finally your last few loves, clinging

like brown leaves to the bare branches of winter,

whatever they might have been, your last few loves.

Were they even people, though? A silly question you might  
think,

but sometimes at the end of our festivities,

we're not all that particular -- the arc of sky

across one corner of your neighborhood,

some buildings framing it just so, perhaps you never

thought of it that way, yet in another sense, perhaps you  
did,

or it was working on you all these years.

You feel it now grow richer, an unexhausted thing though  
small --  
not even small but personal, particular. And mortal too,  
that has to be admitted. You bring mortality to things  
that cannot be exhausted in themselves, the infinite  
becomes the perishing and mortal in your glance,  
while yet remaining infinite. How can you stand to do this?  
Yet nonetheless you do. You make a kind of bubble of it,  
though,  
a glassy envelope inside of which the secret  
transformations  
are always happening. And then you pour them out,  
refilling it all again the following day. Perhaps  
a few shards stick there now and then. You watch them,  
as with children when the first frost of the season  
makes decorative isinglass on every pane --  
breathed-out mists and vague incisions like the small  
handprints of leaves.  
The tunnel hasn't swallowed everything as yet.  
You've rolled it up like paper into a sort of scrolled spy  
glass  
and watch me from your corner of the universe,  
a spy glass or a megaphone. Hello down there, ahoy matey.  
It isn't much, but I appreciate your concern.  
Still in the evening, when I'm riven with anxieties,  
the fear of growing old alone, or with so little money still,  
my mother's cancer or my father's stroke  
my only plausible inheritance, it helps to have companions.  
I'll lose them all of course, just as the poem says,  
Lose all companions, even yourself at last.  
Is there an alternative? I laugh to think of it.  
I laugh into the sky, the blue illusion  
shielding us from everything. (Is everything the word?)  
I laugh into the clouds at sunset turning gold  
and cindering to ash and indigo far down,  
I laugh into the icy surface of the mirror.

This is the face I have to kill. This is to blame  
for everything. If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha.  
This is the bubble that I have to burst.  
Remember twisting out your loose tooth  
when you were a child? I'm not a child anymore.  
Yet in the mean time we can float along,  
blow smoke ring after smoke ring into the winter light.  
I like it sitting by the window where they keep the plants.  
They hang down in their pots from ropes  
as the smoke of your cigarette makes twisting loops,  
cloudy curdlings that spin and drift, a little funnel  
like a maelstrom, a luminous amoebae pulsing once  
then fading, a wispy and collapsing man of war,  
a tiny galaxy floating in one corner, dusty with hazy light.  
Speaking of haze, there's so much smoke in here.  
Yes, it's yours truly, fallen under the table in a coughing fit.  
Yes, I'm turning blue now, yes thank you, oxygen, I'd love  
some.  
It's little things that mean the most. Ah that's better.  
And afterward the two of us will stagger out  
into the winter night. Do you remember when we got so  
drunk  
we started chasing cars the way dogs sometimes do?  
In blue-glistening snow six inches deep we skidded  
stumbling,  
bellowing and barking after any car that stopped  
for very long at a traffic light or stop sign. Skidding, wheels  
spinning,  
fish tailing just a little, they were slow in taking off.  
That's when we ran out from behind the tree  
and really did our best to catch them. They always got  
away.  
What would we have done if we *had* caught up to one?  
(Yes, this actually happened.) The moon was full (of  
course).

the air was absolutely freezing and the sky -- the color of an  
old Noxema jar,  
that cobalt blue, around the moon -- was high and  
absolutely empty,  
no clouds at all, just stars down near the rim.  
The dark streets zigzagged, black tree trunks  
bounced up toward my forehead...and then  
your mittens on my neck... (what for?) as laughter  
dribbled from our frozen mouths. A brown and leafless  
bush  
sand-duned in bluish powder tripped you up,  
and you lay there calling me so many names.  
A snow-puff numb against my face -- I threw one back at  
you,  
our hilarity so vaporous and loud, devoured by moonlit  
silence.  
Then I was swimming through a wave of white.  
It wasn't cold, but dim and wet, and then  
I sunk in further, stepping through into the morning  
and my dormitory room. White walls and sunlit blinds  
make  
trellised light climb up the other wall. Who are you,  
loveliest?  
as you come from the other room, then slipping from your  
clothes.  
Who are you, as you come from the other world,  
that other dispensation of time, your life?  
Both older and younger than I am, who are you, loveliest?  
You bring me lemonade (so hot outside)  
and cantaloupe slices cut into small squares.  
The afternoon light shines in through dusty curtains  
and your skin is radiant and soft and smooth, perfect and  
imperfect both.  
Who are you, loveliest? with your eyes whose clarity  
is both a challenge and a realm of peace.  
Your hair is complicated, full of perfume, full of shadows,

full of months and years. Only now do I notice  
how many different voices you can have.  
You are not singular but many, and I glimpse the others  
who inhabit you. It is they who make you beautiful.  
Who are you, loveliest? But surely I will never know.  
And do I really need to know, to recognize  
the faces hidden in the floral patterns of the old wall paper,  
stained with water seepage? In the dark my flashlight  
shows me where the plaster has flaked down.  
The hallway's floor boards creak beneath my step.  
Dust is in the air, the smell of mold and rot.  
Looking out the window, I wonder is it the snow  
that's falling or is it the house that's rising?  
(Or perhaps the earth itself): upward upward upward.  
Yet is there anywhere to go? Or is it like a bubble  
in a spirit level? We float up for a ways then bump against -  
-  
quite harmlessly -- a mysterious, an invisible barrier,  
the curvature of the dimension that we're trapped within.  
You could say there's no way out, but really it's not that.  
The rules change when we're halfway through the game,  
or maybe we ourselves lose interest in the outcome.

## II

In the sand dunes on the beach there is continuous  
movement.  
It is not the movement of the mind scanning an expanse of  
shore,  
it is the multiple beyond all multiples, the absolutely  
manifold beyond all calculation. How to keep some of it  
in the clearing of these concepts, their minor markings,  
their ambiguous relations? With every gust of wind  
a veil of sand is unfurled momentarily along the surfaces

of several dunes. Blue water, silver water --  
the markings of white caps are clear in the transparent air,  
sharply luminous in the sun. The water is a field of motion,  
like the beach; light plays upon both sea and sand,  
and in the evening the dunes take on an amber tint,  
the surface of the water becomes shale. And yet one is  
aware  
of what is never visible, what cannot be described,  
belonging neither to things themselves nor to fixed  
relations  
but rather to differentials and the flux of differentials.  
Walking out among the dunes the wind blows sand  
into my face. And is it I who feel the gritty surface of the  
wind,  
the small grains sticking to my lips, my hands?  
Sky of empty blue, is it really I? Wind-crossed tormented  
dunescape,  
what are you hiding in your reeds? What waits  
beyond the edge of the horizon? The sea sound echoes all  
around me,  
then subsides, is still at unexpected moments,  
then returns. Which is more startling, the sound  
of massing water or the silence after it?  
The sky goes dark, the dunes take on the color of charcoal,  
the reeds are faint grey lines. Then everything is black.  
The waves wash over me, dark water surging, foaming up  
around my knees. Thousands of miles away are hurricanes.  
Far down, the ocean floor is shifting even now  
with seismic changes, molten magma boils in the earth.  
Above, the stars are numerous, precise, set deep in the  
hypnotic sky.  
How long must I have walked along the shore?  
What waits beyond the realm of mere appearances?  
How can I flee from them? How can I claw away the mere  
shell that I am?  
The street is actually a rebus: words and signs



combine and recombine as we pass under them.  
What is it they shout down to us? I mean  
I get the message but I wonder what the meaning is.  
And yet the surfaces of buildings, too, are a sort of  
language,  
the street a dark yet burning cryptogram  
mutely suggestive of another consequence,  
like tarot cards. What is the mystical body  
that these streets comprise, whose outlines they encode?  
Back in the bar, yes I'm here again, can't keep me away,  
and I like dark places where I can really get in touch  
with myself, with my inmost secret thoughts (you know).  
And now it's raining out, it's raining on the window pane,  
but though we might complain at times,  
what a wonderful thing the rain is actually.  
There's a news stand on the street outside,  
a kind of shed, and the rain falls down onto the roof  
and onto a lower roof made of green plastic  
which protects the rows of newspapers set out.  
Then there's a grated poplar tree nearby.  
I watch the rain come down on all of it.  
It strikes each surface in a different way  
and with a somewhat different rhythm:  
right before the tree, and actually all around it,  
it's like a very fine aluminum mesh being lowered at a  
steady rate;  
in front of one side of the shack the drops are more distinct,  
and there's a gutter that runs along the edge of the shack's  
roof  
and the water that flows down from this is slightly braided,  
luminous like steadily dribbled mercury --  
at times it seems to be an icicle hanging down.  
Well some of that's by Francis Ponge,  
a really fine French poet, I recommend him highly.  
I changed a few things (for the worse, no doubt)

but the subject matter -- the rain, that clear on-streaming  
reality,  
is what's important anyway, not who does what.  
Sitting here, I watch the raindrops running down the glass.  
I pick one out, observing as it ploughs its way  
downward through that surface which is itself a kind of  
world --  
with fields, lakes and rivers, a transparent  
and liquid topography of the vertical. Yet a raindrop  
does not have a specific shape or border, it just flows,  
gathering and dispersing itself both at once,  
yet the self it gathers and disperses is only  
the gathered of a moment since, the dispersed of a moment  
later --  
then vein-like tributaries fork downward  
without warning, like lightning in the night sky;  
the single drop is divided by hidden currents in its past,  
absorbed by another, both travel onward a ways until they  
burst  
in a Pollock-like dribble and three-streamed bleed.  
Then there is a difference in the lighting.  
In the glass world it is multiple, colored at times,  
coming, as it does in our world, from beyond,  
but this time through the ground,  
if we consider the pane of glass a ground.  
Imagine if all of us were lit from underneath  
by lighting streaming upward through the earth --  
(Would we then make floors and streets transparent too,  
so that we would inhabit a kind of huge glass-bottomed  
boat?  
our structures themselves transparent, the world would be  
transparent),  
light a radiant and diffused presence  
illuminating everything from underneath  
or perhaps at times streaming up powerfully all around us,  
clothing us in foot-lit brilliance as, dramatically

illuminated, we cast our outsized shadows into the sky.  
Speaking the language of the heights,  
we discover spaces of which we had not known.  
We are up there in the sky, the clouds, or elsewhere  
on the numerous screens we also live within  
which yet we've simply absorbed into ourselves.  
We are our own screens, now, here, in the region  
of clarity, and of the instantaneous. Here it is us  
enjoying ourselves, and watching ourselves enjoy,  
at the peak of sovereignty. Somewhere  
in the misty streaks I have seen it all.  
The surface of the glass is filled with a blue grey light  
and continues to hemorrhage water as I look at it.  
Beyond, there are dark hauntings  
that pass through so mysteriously fast  
attended by sounds that by themselves  
create the concept of "distance." For there really is no  
distance;  
this is one thing the window has taught me --  
times, moments of illumination -- some harshly white,  
then crimson streaks, an area that's green, red, and orange  
by turns.  
If society were spread out like a transparent surface,  
what would we see flowing into what ?  
Yet it cannot be a surface -- glass, I'm told,  
is actually particles, yet all surfaces are really particles  
(which yet are also waves). What if we saw the street  
as waves rather than as particles, rather than as a grid,  
rather than as a field or a surface or a war zone?  
Yet a wave is occurring somewhere, *in* something.  
Are you riding the wave or drinking the water?  
Are you drowning in the water, breathing the water  
as the wave is passing over you? Or is it many waves?  
Are there many pools of water? But surely  
they must be globes, these infinite unnumbered worlds  
of water beads, yet circles too -- outward and outward,

downward and downward, reflecting the shimmering  
concentric circles  
of your face here in the sentences I've just been writing,  
thinking now,  
where my thoughts meet yours, our two times running  
together.  
Imagine stepping through the curtains of the rain,  
as through all other passages, then out into another life.  
Imagine riding in a bus as the rain comes down outside.  
The night is empty all around, the dark the darkness of the  
countryside,  
and only isolated lights of farms turn slowly past.  
(You remember as a child sitting in the back seat  
as your father drove you through the autumn night,  
or lying in the seatwell looking up,  
watching the dark trees pass there upside down  
in streams along the convex surface of the windows.)  
The ragged shapes of passing trees emerge, the bus goes on  
and on,  
deeper and deeper into night; how totally you are absorbed  
in the motion of the road, the tiny distant lights,  
the movement of your window through it all.  
Your life is absolutely private, all your own.  
Remember now that woman in Amsterdam? You saw her  
through the window then met her, later, half a block away.  
She took you to her room, and what good English they all  
speak,  
hardly any accent at all. They seem American  
with yet some indefinable difference. All sorts of  
magazines  
lying around and a large pile in one corner,  
and she actually did have a candle in a holder of some kind.  
The marks on her arms looked like bruises at first,  
and then her naked body in the shivering twilight  
of the candled room -- candled, yes it was rather like an egg

in a way, a dark one, the candle flame inside instead of underneath  
and then her breasts were so startlingly soft  
(nakedness is always startling though). Then the moment  
nearing the flame itself, and drops, like hot wax, falling  
where her navel had been pierced with a small ring.  
Afterward we lay there for a while,  
and she was strangely talkative; as you might know  
there was this slanted rain coming down outside,  
I could see just past the window shade's near edge  
rain falling like blue chaff past a gray streetlight,  
then it was heavier, and heavier still, and I could hear it,  
a kind of frying sound, on the street outside,  
and I lay there listening to her voice in the dark room,  
her answers that, relatively candid though they were,  
seemed to skirt gingerly around places, names, or dates,  
so that they had a kind of rootless floating quality,  
and her voice went on and on as I listened to the past  
flow into and around the present in the deepening pool  
of the dark uncharted moment, the night's illimitable now.  
But why is nakedness such an overpowering experience?  
Do you remember that time we took a shower together?  
We had never seen each other's bodies before.  
There are times when you wonder what beauty really is.  
Is it anything at all? You glimpse it at moments  
but never can be sure. And maybe it's a drug like any other.  
Sometimes in the evenings now the silence in the empty  
house  
presses in and down upon me, and they say that far down in  
the ocean  
the pressure of the water is so great  
that it can crush even the strongest steel hull.  
Sometimes I feel that the pressure of the silence  
all around me becomes as great as that, and then  
I want to shout or whistle, sing -- do anything --  
to break that silence. I never do, of course, and even if I did

it just would all come rushing back in an instant  
like the darkness when you snap a light off.  
I feel inundated in the silence, and I imagine  
huge and empty structures extending upward over me  
just as I sit right here -- spires towering high up into the  
night,  
whole citadels of emptiness, vacuity and death,  
the true cathedrals of non-being -- massive, weightless,  
oppressive and unreal,  
balanced on the endlessly multiplying instants of Now,  
the eternal present of my stupefying boredom.  
You know I have to admit I really hate not having  
a beautiful young body to look at and to touch.  
And my boredom, the endless hours and seconds of it,  
is like a quagmire I've sunk to the very bottom of,  
there to remain forever. I feel like a crustacean of some  
kind,  
some sort of bottom feeder, a crab, a flatfish,  
sunk to the absolute depths of isolation,  
of my frozen, lightless inactivity.  
And yet there is always beauty everywhere,  
and yet I hate it. Yes, I hate all beauty. I can't help it.  
If I were younger then, yes, maybe then I could -- I don't  
know,  
sort of rouse myself somehow, try to shake myself loose,  
try to compose again, to hear again, to breathe, to live --  
for a composer hearing is like breathing.  
it's living, it *is* life, hearing music in that mysterious  
dimension,  
the inside, the inter-voice, the voice  
among all the other voices, the only beautiful one,  
the single shining thread of gold among the plastic and  
copper wires.  
Yes, for a musician that's the real moment of true life.  
If I were younger, if I were still alive,  
I maybe could try again, and if I did

it would be hard, you know, it would be very hard  
and the only thing that gives you the drive, you know  
there's only one thing that can do that -- beauty,  
the love of beauty. You love it, yes,  
love in the sense of wanting to be united with that thing.  
It's impossible, of course, and yet that's what you feel.  
As on an evening, a crystalline evening in October when  
the sky  
has that infinitely deep cornflower blue  
and you gaze and gaze into it, you want to drink it in so  
deeply  
with your eyes, you want to *be* that luminous color,  
that far empty sky. That's the love of beauty that I mean.  
If I were younger, I could try to have that all again.  
I could try to take that infinite impossible longing  
into myself again. It's painful, though, it's very  
very painful, to hold the infinite inside the finite.  
Beauty is infinite and your mind is finite,  
and that's the reason that it's terrible.  
It's really torture experiencing beauty  
and transport as well. But you get tired, very very tired  
and after a while you can't quite do it any more,  
and then you sink, sometimes before you soared,  
you floated unbounded in the stream of your desire,  
but now you sink, you sink and sink until at last you're  
dead,  
like a stone at the bottom of a well,  
and nothing changes for you then, it's gone,  
it's really all quite gone, and this is the reason  
that I hate all beauty: I have to. I was devastated by it.  
So then it was just the way that certain moments  
move from being so keyed up to something that of its own  
free falling will  
shades off to richer nuances and a deep design  
coming secretly and quite unceremoniously forward,

like a large pile of paper, someone's precious manuscript  
let's say,  
collapsing in charring honeycombs and silver flakes  
around a core of liquid-looking poppy-colored flame  
as we jubilantly burn it out back beside the dumpster.  
Then, through the flames, an unknown face appeared,  
someone who had joined the group before the rest of us  
had really introduced ourselves, first names only though of  
course,  
you know how these things are, and you really *can't*  
be too careful these days, I know you've heard it all before,  
I know  
and you're a woman of means and independent too and  
blah blah blah  
I know and so am I but I'm just telling you we're here to  
have a good time  
and whatever but some of these guys will start to get ideas  
like they own you or start following you around  
calling you and all this kind of thing so then this other guy  
is just sort of *standing there* and I'd noticed him before  
but this was different kind of weird because the I don't  
know -- etiquette ? --  
I suppose is that you don't do that no no that's right what?  
Oh really? No? You're kidding. Oh my god.  
And so of course I was watching him and then I thought  
Well what the hell and so I did and then you're kidding no I  
mean no I mean  
Yes I realize I know I know I was. You were. I was. I was  
*so stupid*  
What was I thinking? I said this to myself like two minutes  
later.  
But in the evening the long shadows reach across the yard  
from the tree and from the wooden fence, a deepening of  
the air and of the light  
that reaches toward an opening, a meticulous  
transformation



as though of everything you are, an inward darkening,  
as we might think of it, not without justification,  
and yet it's nothing but a new and stringent realism,  
a literalness that's like the touch of something  
absolutely clean and cold, like metal, or like total  
rationality.

### III

Pain is the only door that opens on this stairway  
where light is falling, a collapsing chain of golden  
possibility,  
collapsing, therefore, with a certain sureness,  
a certain beauty -- spectral -- rungs inverted, the ladder  
smoldering with that aura peculiar to the unapproachable.  
And yet it is lovely to see it dreaming in its dusty radiance,  
there in the empty air, aslant the white wall  
and the narrow wooden stairs. You step forward into the  
light.

For what reason? To speak, of course. And yet  
the actor doesn't want to say his lines, not really,  
he doesn't even know them. No, it's just  
that he was drawn to the light itself and, trying --  
literalist that he is -- to grab it, he stumbled in here by  
mistake.

Yet when does acting shade off into martyrdom?  
This is an arrow. Now do you see my point? But seriously  
folks,  
who are you loitering there in the darkness,  
and when are the boats embarking for your shores?  
How I wish that I could leave my tiny island  
for those places filled with a more essential clarity,  
beyond the stuff of landscape or desire. For I, too, love that  
which is luminous,  
and here, how strange, and how ironic, I have it poured in  
torrents down all over me,  
the deluge from those buckets, the boiling cauldrons  
hanging there.  
But now it's too late to be helped. (Here there's a black  
out.)

Reversals, foreshadowings, the dark trees flowing toward  
you  
through the headlights' funnel of illumination  
as the landscape, a dark fluid, is poured down into it.  
Where is the threshold you were searching for? --  
whose serrated edge you wanted for your own,  
to feel it there against the skin of memory  
as though it were a blade, yet then a new conception arises  
out of mist and smoke, and what had seemed irrelevant  
becomes the pivot on which days and nights begin to turn,  
and in the process, though freshened briefly by a gust of  
hope,  
you dutifully start in removing those things you won't be  
needing anymore:  
a glove (that's nothing), a finger here, a hand, but then the  
cold  
moves higher and the incisions are more serious.  
Days of the desert, nights lying on the sand, you think of  
St. Jerome,  
and that which comes of passages must also be put down,  
committed to a written script again, if not to memory ,  
passing through all languages, emerging to the other side,  
in the membrane of miraculous appearances --  
and here you step through veil after veil,  
(trampling on them, getting them all messed up,  
and you know she's really *really* going to be pissed,  
those were her favorite ones, that deep blood red,  
saving them for something I suppose).  
But how will you step out again?  
Where are the lights of the city you must wander toward?  
Who is it you might meet along the way,  
and which way must you definitely take  
no matter what directions you've been given,  
no matter how many directions you walk off in?  
Where are the chroniclers who warn you, (or warn of you)  
and the honest citizens whose bones

have since been poured into the walls and thoroughfares?  
The desert is a haunted place though St. Jerome has left,  
translated too no doubt, yet the structure which remains --  
study and columned walkway, the courtyard with its dim  
and twinkling fountain,  
the whole thing, silent on most nights and so remote --  
has to be shared with the haunting and vestigial lion,  
who paces the time of his captivity in the tale  
the length and breadth of the desert,  
resting at evening in the shadowed colonnades.  
They say that if you walk into the sand dunes on a starry  
night,  
the earth will seem a secondary thing, an afterthought,  
and you see it from the standpoint of the emptiness.  
Yet it's no more than a landscape, just as your body is.  
And we had thought so often in outmoded terms  
like "life" or "here and now" or "then" and "over there,"  
and certainly to live the same story as someone else,  
albeit unacknowledged, is a sobering experience.  
Again and again I've placed the same sand grains in the  
same bottle  
and still they haven't grown at all. I must be doing  
something wrong.  
The surface of the desert, though, is mere detritus still;  
it's important to remember this. Yet it has its points of  
interest --  
scorpions casting broach-like shadows in the evening,  
their dusty carapace the color of tar. They seem to have no  
real face,  
and are known to be cannibalistic. The nine-inch centipede  
is fascinating too,  
often the color of ear wax, and in its motion surprisingly  
rapid, like a roach.  
As with roaches, too, the head is horrifyingly precise in its  
awareness,

seeming to possess more than mere intentionality but actual intelligence.

Let's see, we've got your gila monsters next and then the sidewinder

making its cursive yet disjunct figures in the sand,  
a calligraphic text the wind revises to a single page.

Translation could not happen, though, without a rock  
creating a hard place.

Or so we're told at least, by our evening visitors.

But is there any reason to believe those whose whole  
existence

is this trade in rumor and supposition? Tentative in  
movement,

wearing rough and yet complex attire,  
their eyes so beautiful, lithic and so much larger than our  
own,

yet none has ever acted but with the aim  
of setting confusion in our texts and currencies.

To this end they speak without exactly opening their  
mouths,

casting their thoughts directly into yours  
like a pebble shattering a moonlit stream.

Their favorite game is played with pieces of dried bone  
on a target-like mandala. They are neither men nor women,  
and we suspect they drink each other's urine. Still,  
it's possible to really get some work done here, no  
distractions,

girls and bars and all that kind of thing.

We never really know what the project is about,  
though finally we do, of course, but in another sense.

Later you might think you glimpse a pattern to the text  
or to the desert itself. (The desert is full of patterns, having  
so little else.)

Sometimes residents awake from sleep, rushing to record  
what they had seen or heard in that other realm,

“The other courtyard,” as we refer to it. Yet no one ever has success in this.

And I suppose I hardly need to add  
that more than one has wandered off into the wilderness  
at night, just slipped away, out of despair at not recording  
it,  
or else at getting it too well and finding it was nothing  
really.

They hide themselves among the dunes  
and we find them later -- weeks or months it often takes --  
desiccated, weightless, and translucent, like a dry cicada’s  
shell,

(Is this the fabled entity? you think.((Is entity the word ?))  
and bury them in the copper colored sand.

But since we’re trading stories, one of our older residents  
remembers sitting on his patio one evening,  
his matte in his hand, when at the very limit of the desert  
plain

a single dot appeared. In the time it takes the evening to  
become the dusk

the rider had approached; then standing off a way,  
he made shrill squeaking sounds, a kind of mockery  
perhaps,

or possibly his alien language. Yet nonetheless  
our friend perceived this as the challenge that it was.

They met out in the middle of the plain, before the  
emptiness of night,

amid the emptiness of earth, beneath the numerous faint  
stars,

their daggers in their hands, and tangled with each other  
warily,

two mortal spiders exhausting between themselves the  
finite web,

the geometry of battle. Then when an obscure balance  
momentarily appeared, in that instant which they both  
could recognize at once

they both set down their knives at corresponding points,  
and with identical gestures  
switched their places, each picking up the other's.  
Yet in the dawning light the color of rusty tap water  
our old friend saw that his opponent and his counterpart  
had the face of a cicada. Horrified, he ran back to the  
compound,  
crying out, while the other faded, an apparition of twilight,  
with the coming day. Nothing was ever found.  
And yet our friend has never been the same. Well,  
anyway....  
I sometimes ask myself just what would we *do* with trees  
anyhow? --  
here in our complex paradise where we avoid each other in  
our narrow slots.  
And the game really isn't about winning.  
(Slots are insatiable though, they *never* get enough.)  
Do you understand what I'm saying? Do you really  
understand?  
Or is the language that I'm using a flammable, a terribly  
inconvenient thing  
quite dangerous to the user and *pfffft* there I go?  
You didn't like that little crack about slots, did you?  
No, I didn't think so. Well what about crack, ha? What  
about that, ha?  
But in the twilight of occasional rooms, after she has spread  
her legs,  
after taking off her pants after picking up all the quarters  
that have fallen on the floor  
all right I admit whore jokes ok ok enough and then to  
make things worse  
he goes and puts in all this crap about prostitutes and  
Amsterdam  
and this guy has been in Amsterdam like my rear end.  
Well I mean, let me rephrase that, but no you're quite right  
Cindy

from your mid-western hub of solid values,  
you, life-affirming woman of the plains, there with your  
apron  
wiping your work-roughened hands on it even now,  
as I wallow in such contemptible idleness. Ah well, I  
confess,  
the glass is shaking in my hand, will I have the strength  
not to raise it to my lips? Cut, cut, all right I have to admit  
I never was in Amsterdam, there never was a prostitute,  
there was always only you, my little corn-fed something  
something...  
reader jump in here and help me out a little. What word do  
you know that rhymes with -- oh wait, no rhymes here? Ok,  
well that's a change. Well hell that makes it real easy.  
Well shucks ma'am. So anyway that stuff about the  
prostitute was fake.  
I humbly apologize my humble Americans fellow  
Americans I mean  
and I did not inhale and I want to make this absolutely clear  
so that even in the darkness you can read my lips,  
what are they saying now and here and if there never was a  
whore in Amsterdam then who and where and when?  
Where have I been? Dear reader,  
only you can say, for it is you who see me here, albeit I am  
never here.  
And as the day moves outward into its most luminous  
spaces,  
where I have never yet set foot, where none of us really  
has,  
although the feel of that single afternoon so long ago  
when your father's fascinating friend  
who seemed to inhabit a social, economic, and professional  
context  
unplaceable in your seven year old schema -- being no  
one's father,  
not a doctor, not a policeman, not a priest --



did he even have a job ? -- yet how prophetic his untitled  
existence  
now appears to us in our retrospective cinema -- a little bit  
new wave,  
some faintest scent or aura from Belmondo's cigarette  
smoke,  
(didn't his girlfriend look a little like Jean Seeborg?)  
now as we add our numbers and subtract our numbers,  
writing down our name on various dotted and solid lines....  
He took us for a ride in his convertible, the day was high  
and bright  
and running like a kind of stream, so crisp and clear and  
blue,  
the sun was yellow, white, or merely radiant, depending  
on how you looked at things, the wind was absolutely fresh,  
the day was like a luminous adventure we had just arrived  
within,  
setting ourselves inside of it yet blown quite wonderfully  
along.  
The top was down and it was beautiful. How great it was!  
Where do you find convertibles like that these days?  
Do they make anything the way they made it then?  
There is a floor beneath the social realm  
and objects sink beneath our organized notice, and yet  
they lie there in the dim light, and we trip across them,  
wading through  
to reach the third floor or the seventh floor going through  
and out the back or popping over, swinging by where it is  
not the dead  
but other habits and the necessities that organized their  
days --  
their days of blank injustice -- that detain our thought.  
Why are there streets? Where do they come from? Were  
they always here?  
What about that little courtyard where four houses  
share a few trees and some grass? That has a different look.

Left over from another time you maybe say,  
and yet it's in our time. Or is this, too, another time? And  
yet you know it's not,  
there can be only one concept of production, of  
consumption,  
there can be only one world, at any given time.  
In the evening when I walk across the public square  
and the earth has started to withdraw its bruised and  
abraded surface  
from the light of day, from the attentions of the wind,  
from the rupture and liminal contingency of being visible,  
and the air itself is altered with a copper tint in the far  
distance  
and then, more close at hand, with a violet or a dusk-blue  
tone,  
when in the region of transition from activity  
to something guarding its responsiveness in darkness  
and fallen leaves I walk beneath the bare and still-wet trees,  
these living things just lately risen from the earth,  
and I wonder how many days I still have left  
to breathe the scent of wet grass here, and then  
at just that moment a flock of crows so clamorous will  
spread into the sky  
and then alight in the dim gray branches of a nearby maple  
tree,  
the portions of myself I'll never see again  
I put away into a special place; portions of the world that  
are invisible,  
belonging to the past, these also I put there. Yet the evening  
flows  
with gold sand bars of cloud into its final consequence,  
the earth turns further around into the unknown,  
becoming still more unknowable itself,  
and if it is, then I must be as well, you never can be  
absolutely sure.  
Yet even as I say this I look down at both my hands,

catch sight of my face by chance in a store front window.  
The momentary haunted look is there with its peculiar  
hollowness,  
its dark transparency and emptiness still cauling me an  
instant before  
the I-am-looking-at-myself stupidity and blindness  
shut things down. Yet you can never tell the kinds of things  
that still might happen even now -- the special types of  
trees  
you've never seen, an unexpected trip,  
and still, even now, that one overpowering affair, not quite  
like anything.  
Imagine how it might be, the kind of bedroom she might  
have,  
the conversations, the private jokes that no one else will  
ever know about.  
But nothing was intended as a guarantee; living in the  
margins  
of our technological society, not persecuted really,  
yet part of a despised, mistrusted element, a vaguely  
disturbing presence  
dealt with by looks askance and the shuffling of our papers  
to the bottom of the pile, harmless things enough,  
(they *would* exterminate us if they could,  
of course, but rules are rules) we've tried developing  
alternatives  
and strategies. It hasn't worked, but still we've fallen into  
crevices and corners  
here and there, shifting from one hand hold to another,  
not yet crashing through the net of smoke and lenses  
anyway,  
picked up occasionally by special arrangement with her  
majesty,  
temporarily employed for crypto-biological experiments.  
But stepping back from all of this and figuring it quite  
plainly

in the larger scheme of things, we reach up for the bus stop  
signal,  
trying to be recognized as wanting to step down  
among a different set of platforms,  
holding the secret on a slip of paper at the entrance ramp.  
Then in the dark wind tunnel where in simulated flight  
but actual friction we disgorge our most important products  
onto the painted runway lines (I've always liked take off  
the best,  
and landing after that, when the earth comes back to haunt  
you  
like a thing you haven't seen in quite a while),  
with the hair of my former self blown back into my face,  
the floor is opened up beneath me, and the earth,  
the luminous green dial of the earth is naked underneath us  
like a clock.  
We wait for all the forces to align themselves,  
we feel the strange exhilaration -- is it flight, this  
weightlessness?  
Is it soaring that we feel? Or are we merely falling?  
Then, at just those moments when the sky  
is moving toward us, flowing past, flowing around,  
like water parting from a prow, and the earth is flying up  
to meet us like a target, we reach in through the key hole  
past the still wide open door and feel the tiny foot prints  
rush away into the darkness and the running sands.

#### IV

At some point from the desert of my twilight meditations  
I awoke inside another harsh alternative,  
a flat and empty plain, some kind of broad grass land,  
the sky a very high white blue,

at first a few thin alto-cirrus clouds,  
other denser cloud groupings gathered over time. The earth  
itself  
seemed different here; as though it were a scene set,  
you wanted to look round behind the edge of everything.  
Each object had an aura that suggested other purposes:  
the grass was not just grass, it was a sign of something else,  
the clouds were not just clouds, the dirt itself  
had to be doing something, and the ground  
seemed to be floating just ever so slightly off the ground.  
It seemed incredible, and yet you knew quite well  
that this was happening. Feeling around inside myself  
it was apparent that the place had managed to convey  
one thing at least -- that one was not expected to be there,  
no one had expended forethought on our presence  
neither were we targets (that we were aware of anyway)  
for the intentional uses of signs systems.  
This was itself a fascinating circumstance,  
and novel too. Think of how seldom  
that would ordinarily occur; even if someone  
plopped you down somewhere in the middle of the woods  
to make your way back by yourself --  
you're out there all alone, yet even then there's usually  
some little thing intended just for you  
or anybody able to decipher those particular semiotic  
nudges.  
Let's say you've got some Wriggley's Spearmint Gum  
in your pants pocket, or you've got the old Swiss army  
knife  
your father gave you way back  
when you did that great father/son thing  
in the boy scouts or whatever it was.  
But a knife's an implement, and an implement implies a  
hand,  
and is, in certain respects, itself a concrete sign.  
(Isn't there something like this in Heidegger? --

I said, “something like” There’s no need to be so fussy here.

This is poetry.) So now you see

the kind of highly unusual, perhaps unprecedented circumstance this must have been for us.

We all had walked in naked on the final scene:

here, now, a world of some unknown kind,

a species of affliction in a sense, or the general form of it, discovered for the first, or final, time

and we were either very early, impossibly so,

or else extremely late (and this was equally impossible).

Just then we noticed a small house in the foreground,

a concrete bunker rather than a house, nearby a single tree,

no garden, though, or anything like that.

Rather than being a structure for inhabitants,

the house had no human purpose to contaminate

an alien purity shining visibly around it.

And was the light the substance of an illusion, a mirage,

or was the illusion the thing which gave substantial

existence

to the light which seemed somehow itself

to cling to objects rather than falling

as a product of the sun, which was not absolutely visible,

only relatively so; that it was moving could not be verified.

Yet out of it came birds, flocking in the sky growing

steadily deeper.

Some were alighting, disappearing underneath the waves of the grass

like diving birds beneath the surface of a vast green lake.

Then, after an indeterminate amount of time, it all was

absolutely clear:

the idea of a woman was present everywhere

in the sky, though nowhere visible, the abstract outline

and conceptual scheme, though not the visible illusion,

and every moment was both true and false

and likewise none was true and none was false.

Then, if the descent of violence, its propagation on the earth,  
were in itself the dark thread flowing in the fabric's stream,  
would it be possible to break the multiplying networks,  
the fabric's lines and spaces, the webs of the sheer descent?  
Can the spider turn upon itself, realizing that it is itself a web  
and that the web's a spider of a different kind?  
The rough spines of the grass were like a sort of spider leg  
pelt  
waving into the humid light, and onstage everything  
is flowing past in all directions, since there is no camera,  
so illusions of whatever kind always seem  
absolutely right, appropriate, and not by merely fitting in a place  
but only by creating that very place itself, the idea of causality,  
of space and time inside an indefinable region,  
therefore, maybe not inside but rather linking forth  
a transient constellation, time-points from here and there.  
But now there was a "here," and then a gradual departure  
from the present life, as when your mood changes  
and, really, you really no longer feel very good,  
the symptoms you had thought yourself so well rid of  
now suddenly return and the project takes on a darker,  
grimmer tone,  
no longer helping things along the street,  
the light, the air as you flow into it,  
but bogging down and deadening and narrowing.  
And yet it was this, the desire to touch the limit of the world,  
to be a kind of sexual outlaw, that really sealed my fate,  
apart from the bright disruptions in the distance of the sky,  
near where it started to become another thing,  
the visible image of the unattainable, the final token of the lost.

Yet how these private images can change the very texture  
of the radiance, the second life of fire.  
It wasn't the same way when I looked again.  
But now the terrible eruption has occurred.  
It isn't what you'd thought, rather it was this other thing.  
You know it when you see it, like pornography,  
the violent root choking her repeatedly, thin lines of grainy  
video  
like water flowing past, like sand, you think of wood grain  
coaxed and questioned into fluent shapings  
by the working hand, and I came back to the empty image  
on the screen  
which yet had somehow disguised itself as landscape  
although in a still unorthodox acceptance, an investiture of  
sorts --  
the feeling of the day in stasis, the light not going  
anywhere,  
the battered woman's bruised up face is visible on the  
television screen  
**WHICH IS A LANDSCAPE** the light does not really  
touch her.  
You know it isn't really touching her **IT'S FAKE**  
but renders her observable, she wears a business suit  
and one eye is swollen almost shut, yet what has been  
repeated  
can't necessarily continue to be repeated, and rats are  
rushing over  
the dried blood, the severed finger lay in a white cloth  
wrapped up and blood had soaked it almost all the way  
through;  
white cloth and a deep cadmium red blood stain, a deeper  
than poppy crimson  
and women hanging in the barn from beams  
their dresses tied up around their heads, their faces  
with burlap over them, the picture, though, is oddly  
cropped



as though the photographer were interrupted having *seen everything*  
the camera itself I mean, and yet debris continues to pile up.

The wind is driving everything, the bunker not a final place,  
although it is a landscape too and landscape must mean that which can be walked upon like a woman's stomach, say,

just as an example, or the side of her face perhaps.  
But the wind continues, it is not from any likely source, the clouds in the sky are flowing opposite, as though in flight.

It is a curious thing, a vector like a triangle pointing in an opposite direction. But again on the threadbare screen the woman's face is like a condensation of grief.

It is an inexplicable thing. I have seen this somewhere, I know.

Then entering the house, the bunker now, you realize it has been used for things you've never had even the most remote experience of. You know you can't imagine it, your eye, though seeing little, strives to see even less. The light possesses total clarity now, illuminating just the four bare concrete walls.

What is that on the table? that mattress, what kind of thing is that? -- the light a kind of silver dust. Having stepped through the rain, the hail of electrons, the surface of the screen, as through all other surfaces, we stand at last in the place of darkest origins.

Yes, here it is, now what do you think of it ? *having seen everything*

You yet have not seen this *having done it all*

Well there was that conference in San Francisco then Lilli and I decided to do Club Med I know it was absurd

well I mean this guy was gorgeous no NO English  
I know it was insane oh what the hell no no no no  
Don't even joke about such things he'll never know.  
And what actually have you done? And now the strange  
men enter,  
they bind the woman, an actual one this time  
rather than a sandstorm of electrons, they bind her on the  
table.

They like to have fun doing this, so one of them  
has brought some beer, the others open theirs and drink.  
The first man though approaches her, eventually  
they all are finished with her, she isn't moving any longer.  
Then there is a black out. Luminous markings  
like a sketch made on the night itself with radium,  
glow tape, a moving as of shadow specters in the wings,  
the theatre is haunted, although empty, a wind  
is blowing through the tall grass plane  
which seethes and flows in the darkness just outside.  
The wind comes in as though from an enormous distance,  
perhaps it is a cosmic wind, an interstellar wind  
that shakes the theatre before our eyes --  
the walls begin to crack, the lights come slowly up,  
then cut to black, even the radium sketch marks disappear.  
The men, all four of them, are staggering beneath the  
weight  
of shadow hands which press them down into the floor.  
In the night a single point of light is lit above the grass,  
it grows into a wave of horses ridden by a troop an army an  
infinity of women --  
amazons. The walls of the theatre collapse, the women  
walk in through the walls, their horses saunter off into the  
audience,  
become the audience themselves, the books are piled high,  
at what was center stage the fire reaches up into the night.  
The men are killed, dismembered, their bodies thrown into  
the fire,

the actors take off their costumes, the audience members  
step out of their horse rear ends, the fire marshals close the  
theatre down,

the landlord sells the place, it's now a video arcade,  
rapists and torturers collect their pensions. The single  
and original woman then returns, crawls up from  
underneath

the ashes, black streams and smears of wet ash, oily  
smearings on her face,

the sky is growing slowly blue, the high clouds reappear

### **UNDER A NEW SUN**

Outside the house, the bunker, there are several trees  
that fill with tiny birds or are they rather locusts? Woman,  
now strange creature wandering toward the city of a  
thousand years.

The oil derricks scattered on the plain, though still,  
the remnants from the other time. And then the man  
appears,

he crawls out from beneath the pile of charred texts,  
the floor boards of the stage lead off like sight lines  
to infinity **FORGOTTEN** then vanish in the distance never  
touching anything.

They are astonished at each other, it's a momentary thing,  
a trick of light, the clouds amass and darken, the oil  
derricks wait,

the two approach each other, they're the only two,  
the first touch only fingertips, they have not spoken  
nor do they attempt to speak, they touch their mirroring and  
open palms,

their mouths touch briefly at the lips but then slide deeper  
in, each opening into each, he gathers her buttocks up,  
she tries to climb up and onto him, they lie down on the  
floor,

clothes are shed instantly as though they were never there,  
his penis now inside of her, the two of them still smeared  
with dirt

as though they had just risen from the grave, a steady  
working of her hips at first but then a harder riding before  
long,  
the climactic moment melts around both of them, she falls  
forward onto him.  
It's a job like any other, though, that's what I always say to  
people  
who ask me what it's like, and yet I have to say it isn't  
like, you know,  
that anyone could do this sort of thing, teach here. You  
know I've always felt a kind  
of kinship with these other areas of life we know so little  
of, the fountainhead  
of inner structures that just kind of spills it all all over the  
place, and it was  
like really wild I mean like *really* wild, I was there and  
Derek and the others,  
they were all out on the patio, it was dark, the night was  
like the depth of possibility,  
the times I know that what is going on inside me *is* the holy  
in itself, in all its purity, and then it's like I just don't  
question it,  
I don't, I just like go, and then I thought about the time this  
guy,  
this really cool professor I once had, he like spoke Japanese  
and everything,  
he could talk about Milton Yeats and Joyce and all this  
stuff, and you know  
like one time he said he thought an enlightened selfishness  
was really the best thing.  
Well it's like, you know, I think that too. I mean, you  
know, it's you  
That's it here I am I'm a girl in this society I mean I have  
certain rights  
I'm sorry but I do and if someone doesn't like it well fuck  
them.

The first time that it happened...I must say I don't know if this

is the way to put it really, suddenly she was there...

*You kind of get into it little by little. And one day you wake up,*

*and there you are.* I was asleep actually. And in my dream I was in a sort of tunnel, standing there but also walking, drifting rather, and there was rain all around me, in the tunnel.

And a vague light. And then there was a face at the end of it,

but not really. A voice perhaps. But not really. It was sort of....

They say this place is strange. In old times they burned witches here.

**But I've heard, I've read actually, there's a kind of fad thing going on**

**with all this. Kids dressing in black, pretending to drink each other's blood, all this. Christ, what bullshit. I read this article about these kids,**

**chains, all dressed in black, real pale, dark circles under their eyes,**

**all this kind of thing,** and I woke suddenly and at first I knew he was there,

and there was a shadow over near the drapes, my heart pounded so,

I almost spoke aloud, so sure I was, **but then they'd done something**

**like sacrificed seven cats and three dogs in some graveyard**

**I think it was in Seattle or maybe in Germany -- Munich?**

**One of the dogs was a shepherd and they'd...**

**they'd sawed its head off, with a chain saw,**

**and I saw the picture of its head lying there near a gravestone**

**and its body about ten feet away. It said  
they'd used animal tranquilizers to knock it out.**

And then it was her. She was just standing there, near the drapes.

Her expression was so...odd. Both shy and bold. Afraid lest I become angry,  
also embarrassed at herself. And yet there was something else

*But the thing that always seemed to me, it was like people think of it  
as a sort of joke or something – not a joke really. They think that it's a game.*

*Yeah. They think that it's a game. In a way it is, you know, really.*

*You're playing with...it's sort of interesting, it's not like you're swallowing a pill  
or drinking something. Smoking's kind of normal too I suppose.*

*But this is something you put it right in your vein. That's different.*

And then she spoke, almost inaudible at first,  
I couldn't even be sure of what she'd said,  
and then I knew, and then she said it again, very softly,  
*yeah and like I read somewhere scientists like back in the old days  
would try things out on themselves. It's kind of like that in a way.*

*Like an experiment. The thing of it is...it's wonderful.  
I don't know how to describe it. You sit there,  
you watch your blood in that little tube, and it blossoms there,  
like a flower. The first time that I saw my own blood there.  
I sat there and it was like someone had wrapped me up  
in this tent or something, like this warm feeling all around me,*

*not just in me, but like all around me, and then I saw more clearly*  
in the darkness this strange look in her eyes,  
and then I asked her what she wanted and she said my name again,  
and then she approached nearer the bed, but she was different now,  
and then I realized, and why I hadn't noticed before I don't know,  
perhaps it was the darkness, but suddenly I saw  
**and I still remember seeing the cats and the dog there, the cats were just these kind of shapeless things sort of scattered around, one was draped over this gravestone, I remember it looked like a lady's fur stole or something, just this limp thing, but the dog seemed like it was still running, its body was just laying there on the ground, but its legs had this look like they were still running and I just sat there**  
*staring down at the little tube of crimson that was stuck to my arm like a leach,*  
*and I just thought, how beautiful. It sounds sick, I know. So anyway,*  
*yeah it's like there's all this like a fad -- people, especially here in this town, you know, trying heroin. Cool thing to do.*  
*I read somewhere someone was saying it's the climate. That it rains so much.*  
*Like a kind of a cocoon I guess -- all the rain, the clouds, people like it after a while,*  
*they feel less exposed. Kind of like when you were a kid in gym class?*  
*and you weren't any good at baseball, but that's what you had to do.*

*So if it rains, then the game's called off. I think that's it -- people like all the rain.*

*They feel their life has been called off. And that's what heroin does too.*

*I remember the first time. She had put her wedding dress on,*

*and I said to her, Lilly, why do you have your wedding dress on?*

*And then I realized, as she came closer, that it was really my wedding dress.*

*What are you doing? I said. **The police were standing around with their flashlights,***

***it was night, when the picture was taken, and the red blood***

***in the patrol car headlights, and I just sat there and it was like***

*I sort of floated out into a kind of runway or something, like a long tunnel.*

*And then she answered me, but now it was her normal voice,*

*she said, I love you. Just that. *And it was raining in the tunnel,**

*and there was this soft peaceful light over everything.*

***And I couldn't stand to look at the red...meat of the animals,***

***the dog, where its neck had been cut, that raw hole there.***

*And I said Lilly come and sit near me, and she did.*

***And so I just put the magazine down. And then I threw it out.***

***And I was over near the sink, and there were tears.***

***I couldn't help it, I know it's stupid.** And she was still, and I held her.*

**And I just like sat there... like totally...still...inside, but also I was walking,**



*sort of drifting, the whole time, through this long tunnel,  
and the rain was coming down.*

V

The glass was filled with strange light. I'd never seen  
the sort of space between the files of blue and small designs  
that seem to be lowered from the top  
as though a film were being shown there  
or a curtain slowly unfurled a silken banner  
announcing the space where the summer brings its blue and  
crystal,  
a diffusion of many hours into a new dimension, a deeper  
and more lasting plane,  
which is a rule that we've established here  
for when the world reflected is so much less appealing,  
only curiously so, and yet by means of it  
we see the underside of light itself as it streams down  
moment by fleeing moment through the doors  
that someone keeps opening every morning,  
closing again every night, and how I wish the two of us  
could just kind of hang out sometime I know I know you're  
married

well I am too no to tell the truth I really don't think she'd mind.

Do you think your wife would? I don't know, it's complicated.

I used to think it would never be anything I'd want to get mixed up in

but now the more I think about it, it's like the other side of dreams is always the part you have to be most curious about, like looking around the corner of the picture just before you've drawn it, and then the other time when you and I were sitting in that other bar, the other place, isn't it funny how they all have that name these days. Was there ever a time they didn't?

And the rain kept making shapes like -- stalactites is it? or the other kind? down and down the window.

The heavy rain, I've never seen it quite like that before, and you didn't seem to mind at all, not really, although the place was very smoky and they say it isn't good for the complexion and so forth. But you turned to me quite simply, almost candidly, and said you didn't mind, you'd rather just sit there and wait for the storm to pass. I don't think they ever do, I remember thinking, though I didn't say this at the time. I should have, though. It was just one of those moments you wish you could revisit in reality since you do so often anyway in your head.

But oh well I didn't, I don't know what came over me.

The way to go forward is by not trying to.

You have a problem when you begin thinking of the next syllable too long. Not thinking too is an alternative,

though not a solution. Rather we have to tell ourselves as we near the entrance to the tunnel (watch your head) that amusements are people too, and yet none of it

must be taken too seriously, certainly not to heart.  
That's what my grandmother always said.  
All right I admit, I lied; she never said anything like that.  
But warnings should be posted in more prominent places  
I always like to think, otherwise it's counterproductive.  
But think of how it is, of all the subtle clues and hints  
by means of which you try to figure out  
whether this other wants to sleep with you or not --  
the way they don't respond to any of your e-mails  
or it takes them almost a whole week.  
They always have some very polite excuse of course,  
then there's the glance that won't quite meet your own  
or else the quiver in it of -- is it of *amusement* ? --  
there in the shimmering moment of meeting and passing in  
the hall.  
But in the streaming sunlight afterward, as you walk down  
to the corner --  
you have to stop in at the pharmacist's, there's something  
else  
you have to do, you know, you keep forgetting --  
the ways, the means by which it's done  
become more mysterious as you realize  
how numerous they are, every gesture at each moment  
seeming to have this echoing significance, a radiant  
penumbra,  
the aura of primitive acceptance or rejection.  
But then you realize, looking at the roof  
of some building as it flashes in the sun,  
that no one really is ever in control,  
they just want you to think they are.  
They aren't though. The day, the space itself, the light,  
the overwhelming power of this body of desire  
is like a sea we all are borne amid, bathe in by day  
and drown in every night, and drown in finally.  
And yet it isn't held in common, is it?

Since so much is given to the fortunate, and to the unlucky  
nothing.

At any rate, the next day comes, the returning thing, the sun  
that we know does not regard us and which knows nothing  
of us,

but we've been taught to think of it as human  
and even the most fleeting metaphor  
seems to have something of that lie embedded in it,  
but the mind, you know, that is to say my temperament,  
I really don't know anything about the mind,  
but there it is, it's only how the moments  
flow through that tiny part of me I recognize as myself,  
like sand grains sifting down through that narrow cervix  
in the hourglass, the mind still has to have  
something to connect to, some transparent thing  
like plastic wrap enveloping the whole.

I'd like to envelop your whole or whatever.

That was whole I said, whole, I'm really not that crude,  
anyway I wouldn't say that to you, not here at any rate.  
Wait till we get outside, and it was outside that was the  
question

I'd been thinking of so long, as though far back at the  
beginning  
before we'd come along into the scene  
or even I myself alone as usual blundering in here  
on my way to somewhere that I can't recall,  
perhaps I glimpse it every now and then, perhaps I don't.  
It's autumn now, they still burn leaves here  
just the way we used to do. It's been ages since I've seen it.  
And yet out here in the provinces things are so curiously  
slowed down.

I walk out now, tirelessly, out into the waiting autumn  
evening --

and here, here, here, here, here I am.

The inky color of the clouds that flow across the sky,  
like the hair of a medusa, long and thick with serpents,

the flashing eyes of portents, the opening, the advancing  
of an underworld, fills me with thoughts that are not  
graspable  
entirely of some catastrophe approaching.  
But gathering darkness accustoms me to darkness,  
and slowly I grow calmer with the thought of night.

## AFTERWORD

### Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

*Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?*

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

*A cliché?*

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in

themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

*Do you consider yourself a political writer?*

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

*Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?*

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

*How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.*

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages,

if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

*There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?*

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

*What sorts of things are you working on currently?*

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

*All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?*

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

*There are many other things to talk about, but perhaps that's a good note to end on for now.*

*But what were you trying to do in this poem in particular?*

A friend said that she thought the poem was about "negotiating aloneness." I think that's a good comment. Obviously it was influenced stylistically by Ashbery. But I think it is a bit more surreal. It is the first poem in a trilogy.





## About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

## About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2008 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.